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Navy Inquiry Court Today Begins Investigation of Pueblo's 11 Months

CORONADO, Calif. (AP) — A year ago this week, while on an intelligence mission off the coast of North Korea, the USS Pueblo radioed: "More company."

What happened next, and for the 11 months the 82 surviving crewmen were interned in a North Korean prison compound, will be scrutinized starting Monday by a Navy court of inquiry.

Meeting in a 111-seat classroom at the Naval Amphibious Base here, across the bay from San Diego, will be five admirals headed by Vice Adm. Harold G. Bowen Jr., commander of the Pacific Fleet antisubmarine warfare forces.

Since the crew's release Dec. 22, and through more than three weeks of debriefings at the San Diego Naval Hospital, much of the country has speculated about what the court will find.

Was the Pueblo within North Korean territorial waters when she was taken? How was the ship captured, and why didn't ... scuttle the ship? How much secret equipment and information was destroyed? And what of the crewmen's confessions, later repudiated, to their captors?

These questions will be central to the inquiry.

The Navy already has supported the crew publicly. Adm. Thomas I. Moorer, chief of naval operations, has said the Navy never believed the Pueblo entered North Korean waters. And Rear Adm. Edwin M. Rosenberg, in charge of getting the crew back to the United States, has said, "As far as the U.S. Navy and the nation are concerned, these men acted honorably."

But a few high officials, notably Sen. Richard B. Russell, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have criticized the crew's conduct during and following the seizure.

The inquiry is not a trial, but the court can recommend action for the Navy to take. This could range from medals for the men to disciplinary action.